

LutheranWoman

June 2009

TODAY



**Will They Be Back?
Singing with Mary**

**Do Not Be Afraid—I Dare You
Confirmed in Community**



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SEASONS IN THE LIGHT OF FAITH

VOLUME 22 NUMBER 5 JUNE 2009

The seasons of our lives—from girlhood to womanhood to old age—bring both joys and challenges. One thing we can count on is that God's love for us never changes.

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VOICES

Audacious Assignment

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

Welcome to our new

summer Bible study, “Mary: A Woman for All Seasons” by Christa von Zychlin. In this session, we reflect on Mary’s life as a very young woman. Christa writes, “Hope was bare and frozen for God’s people who lived on a hilly strip of land called Judea. . . . And yet, just like the buds in earliest spring, God’s life forces were stirring. God’s power was about to be made known in a teenager’s courage to take on an audacious assignment.”

Are you willing to take on “an audacious assignment” yourself? In “Do Not Be Afraid—I Dare You,” Tana Kjos writes that “living a bold life on purpose, a life like Mary’s, begins with knowing that God is calling you to participate in something bigger than yourself.” Tana goes on to challenge readers to “participate in God’s mission to bless the world.” The mission statement of Women of the ELCA is “to mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.” Are you willing to work boldly with God to bless the world?

We can begin blessing the world in the places nearest to us. As we reflect on Mary as a young woman, let’s think about ways we can have a positive influence on the young people in our lives—in our families, our congregations, our communities.

In “Singing with Mary,” Jennifer Baker-Trinity considers how we can be mentors to one another—older to younger, younger to older—and how music itself can mentor us in our faith. “Think of a song you learned as a child that you

still know by heart,” she writes. “When you hear that melody, you are transported to another place. The music itself becomes a mentor that accompanies you along your life’s journey.”

In many congregations, young people seem to drift away as they grow up. In “Will They Be Back?” Rod Boriack writes, “It’s tempting to think that if we could just get them back through the front door and sitting in a pew again, all will be well. . . . But it’s not that simple.” Rod’s suggestion: Take the time to reach out and *talk* with the young people you know, and to really *listen* to their stories.

For many young people, the milestone in their life of faith is confirmation when they publicly affirm their baptism in the presence of the community. Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen reminds us that “we are named by Holy Baptism as ‘children of God.’ We share the joy and responsibility of shaping one another in the Christian faith.”

Finally, in this issue, we honor a writer whose faith has been an example and encouragement to many of us—Marj Leegard. Anne Edison-Albright interviewed Marj, who turns 89 in August, at her home in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. We hear in Marj’s own words about her life’s journey and the joy of writing. She has been a mentor to many and a gift to the church. While she is retiring from her regular column, we hope that she will still write for us from time to time. Thanks be to God for Marj! 🌸

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You may write to her at LWT@elca.org.

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MARJ LEEGARD *writer*



Marj and Jerome

In our May issue, Marj Leegard announced her retirement from regular column-writing for LWT. If you would like to send a note of appreciation to Marj, write to her in care of Lutheran Woman Today, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago IL 60631. We will be delighted to forward your notes to Marj.

When Marj Leegard found out she'd been nominated to be a national board member for the American Lutheran Church (ALC), she felt conflicted. On one hand, it would be an amazing opportunity to live out her call to lay leadership and her commitment to ministry in daily life. In the late '60s and early '70s, such leadership positions were just beginning to open up to women in the ALC.

On the other hand, being a board member meant frequent travel and occasional week-long absences from her family and the farm in Detroit Lakes, Minn. Marj told her husband, Jerome, she was going to say no.

"You should do it," said Jerome. "Someday you'll be looking out of a nursing home window, and you'll want good memories to think about. I can take care of things here."

In Marj Leegard's life and work, there are recurring themes: discipleship and ministry in daily life; stories of family and friends interwoven with a persistent message of grace; and stories of what it means to tell stories, to claim *writer* as part of one's identity.

MINISTRY IN DAILY LIFE

Somehow we failed to sense that Nellie, too, had a ministry. How could we have forgotten that when we visited a home filled with sickness or great joy or sorrow and Nellie's cookies were there? When our babies were small, Nellie never asked, "Girl or boy?" She knew. And she knew their names. "There is little Jimmy," she would say, "and he is such a good boy."

I asked Nellie once how she could remember all those names, and she looked at me with

by Anne Edison-Albright

ponder. "How can you pray for them if you do not learn their names at their baptism?"

It is too late to thank Nellie in person or to speak to her about her special kind of ministry, since she is no longer around to hear. But there is still time to remind ourselves and others that recognition of all our faithful ministers is in itself a ministry. Today would be a good time to start. ("Nellie's Cookies," *Give Us This Day* by Marj Leegard, Augsburg, 1999)

Born in 1920, Marj grew up in the Methodist church during a time when there was a strong emphasis on social issues. Every fifth Sunday was Temperance Sunday. Marj says, "Dr. Wittenberg would bring a liver and a jar to show the Sunday school what cirrhosis looks like. I signed a pledge that I would never drink."

From an early age, Marj was aware of a strong connection

between faith and everyday life, "although then, it was all *don'ts*: don't drink, don't dance, don't gamble . . ." Later, Marj found heroes of faith in everyday life in her circle at Richwood Lutheran Church. "When I first joined the congregation, Nellie would call every time circle met until finally I went. I was so glad I did. The women at circle loved our son—they always said, 'such a beautiful baby,' and they complimented anything I baked."

DISCIPLESHIP AND LEADERSHIP

The centerpieces on the dining room tables at church are new and bright. Martha made them. The women of the Dorcas Circle prepared scraps and patched 100 lap robes. Martha was there cutting and stitching. Is there one who needs encouragement or company for a lonely task? Martha will be there. ("By Faith," October 1994, *LWT*)

The Dorcas Circle's ministry to Marj affirmed and encouraged her ministry and discipleship. Marj remembers, "In 1950, I started getting involved in the women's organization beyond the congregation. I thought, 'These women, they know everybody. I can't do this.'" As Marj's involvement grew, she felt empowered by what these women—she among them—could do.

"Our organization changed the position of women in the community. We knew Robert's Rules of Order and could outshine the men at a meeting anytime.

"At two- to three-day circuit meetings we would meet with missionaries. We had a feeling of involvement—we were sending money to a missionary—David—who we'd met and we knew, and this gave us a sense of closeness to the mission field."

In 1969, Marj was elected American Lutheran Church Women (ALCW) synod president and became a member of the ALCW Board of Regents. Marj says, "It was one of those moments when you know you were there for a reason. The church was on the edge of something."

Marj said that in 1970 in San Antonio, Texas, the American Lutheran Church "decided women were people." They changed the language in the constitution from *man to person*.

The ALCW executive board members attended as official visitors. They were there, but they couldn't vote. "The caucus of women delegates could fit in a phone booth," Marj joked.

The ALCW president did have five minutes to report to the assembly about its mission support, charitable giving, and quilt-making. Before the meeting, the board president had asked the synod presidents to bring district banners.

"She got up to speak and the man who ran the public address system, as pre-arranged, began to blast 'Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore' as we marched in, waving our banners.

"We are here and we are here to stay!" Marj said the president proclaimed. "They voted to change the language that afternoon."

FAMILY MATTERS

When we are planting vines and flowers, I mumble, "Why are we doing this? She is not here. She is not here." And then I know that God created her body and gave us the gift of a daughter for earth years and for eternity. There is thankfulness in the rush of color, the blooms of the flowering crab apple trees. We must have a place of remembrance, and in the old cemetery we find one place.

("Groundedness," May 1998, LWT)

Marj remembers: "I met Jerome in 1941, and I met the Lutheran church at the same time. For Jerome, the center of his faith was his church and his congregation, Richwood Lutheran.

"You know, brides are married in their church. Well, we went around and around with that. In the end, we got married in the Lutheran church on a Sunday afternoon."

When Marj and Jerome first married, Marj didn't want attend the Lutheran church, and stayed home on Sunday mornings. "One Sunday morning in 1944 I was sewing clothes for our baby, and Jerome came home from church singing 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken?' I laughed, but I made up my mind. It wouldn't be broken.

"I didn't want to join the Lutheran church. Now our grandson is the fifth generation at Richwood."

Marj and Jerome's daughter, Laurie, died of cancer at age 27. "I

would give up everything to have that child back," she says. "Faith is not a pretty thing, not what you dreamed it was. It's not what you wanted it to be, but it's there.

"Nothing will bring that child back. Not prayers. Not the strength of faith. Nothing. We never have the sense to give thanks for God's gift of eternal life. If that's not enough, God must weep."

MINISTRY OF WRITING

Now the dawn leads into day along eastern ocean beaches. The places where breakers roar and winds move sand, people gain strength from the elemental movement of water and land. The artist gathers her brushes and begins to form a palette of grays and blues. Lights and darks. The writer sits before a blank page and shapes the opening line. The musician listens for the inner melody that will be music only if she makes a mark upon the staff. The people of God are creating. God has new voice. ("The Sounds of the Church," September 1997, LWT)

Marj took on an identity as a writer at an early age: "In fifth grade I entered the Women's Temperance League's writing contest. I wrote a story about a man who was in jail for drinking. My story beat all the fifth- and sixth-graders, and I won the prize of \$5 cash. I went to J.C. Penney's and bought new shoes and a new dress and I stil

and money left over. I was a writer from that day on."

Later in her writing career, Marj began to encourage others to claim writer for themselves. "At workshops, I ask them, 'Are you a writer?' Many people say no, they don't think of themselves as writers. I tell them: A writer is someone who writes. You write because you have to. You've got to get it out."

THANKS, MARJ

The man arrived early for the farm auction. His old friends were moving to town. The boxes were ready on the flatbed wagons. There was no extra room in the new, smaller house. No shop. An efficiency kitchen.

He hardly looked into the boxes, for they were always the same. Good covers for kettles. Why only the covers? Then I remembered that the kettles went on another use. Some held geraniums on the porch steps. Some held oyster shells in the chicken coop. Some were nests for the banty hens the kids raised. Some were repaired and made welcome water sources in the yard. It was only the kettle covers that stayed unchipped. Only the covers that had no further function.

Our children are grown and capable of telling us what to do. We are now the grandmothers and great-grandmothers of the generation pictures. We are the covers. . . . We can let ourselves be covered, unchipped, undented, and unused. For we can be the kettles that are never

assigned to the useless and unnecessary corner. It doesn't matter that we no longer bubble on the stove from morning until night. We've done that! We still make nesting places and produce blooms and provide water for the thirsty.

God has plans for each of us, for all of our days. We listen as we pray. We listen as we read. We listen as we hear the gospel. While we listen, we hear our names called. There is today a place where you are needed. Where you can be the feet, the hands, the heart, the generosity, the love of Christ in God's creation. "He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless" (Isaiah 40:29). God's children are never discarded. Never useless. Never too old. ("Kettle Covers," May 1995, LWT)

Marj keeps an updated list of favorite hymns she wants sung at her funeral. Jerome says Marj wants "a funeral in the afternoon, a concert in the evening." Her list includes "Thy Holy Wings," "Borning Cry," and "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," which a nurse in Fargo sang as daughter Laurie went in for surgery.

Marj stopped traveling after her second heart attack, but continues to write and to host family and friends at her home with Jerome in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

Marj says, "I always think of my 50th birthday present from Jerome: a guitar. To think I could learn to play a guitar at 50 clearly said, 'Life is not over.'"

After Laurie's wedding, Marj found a note that Laurie left for her parents. It read: "Thank you for 20 beautiful years. I love you." Marj writes, "We would have been as good parents as we could be without Laurie's gratitude, just as God is good to us without our thanks. If our hearts help us remember the joy of that benediction for us, we will give it more often to God and our families."

Marj Leegard's first "Give Us This Day" column ran in the March 1994 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today*. Each column since then has offered readers faith-filled gifts wrapped in stories of everyday life.

Thank you, Marj, for your leadership, ministry, writing, and welcome. Thanks be to God for the blessing of your faithful witness. 🌿



Anne Edison-Albright (pictured above with Marj) is a Horizon International Intern, serving at Bratislava International Church and teaching religion at the Evangelical Lyceum in Bratislava, Slovakia. She is a candidate for ordained ministry in the ELCA.



CALENDAR NOTES

June

*compiled by Audrey Novak Riley
from sources including Evangelical
Lutheran Worship (ELW), Sundays
and Seasons, and Lutheran Book
of Worship (LBW), published by
Augsburg Fortress, Publishers
(www.augsburgfortress.org)*

Now we begin the long green season after Pentecost, when the church ponders what it means to live in the life of the Holy Spirit. Jesus shows us and tells us about it over and over in the Gospels appointed for the Sundays of this season.

1 Visit of Mary to Elizabeth (transferred)

This commemoration is usually on May 31, but since Pentecost falls on that day this year, it is transferred to June 1. It's interesting to see the parallels between Hannah's song in the first reading and Mary's song in the Gospel; both women are singing God's praises as they rejoice in the conception of long-awaited child. Hannah had longed for a child of her own; the whole world longed for Mary's child. Today's texts are 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Psalm 113; Romans 12:9-16b; Luke 1:39-57.

3 Martyrs of Uganda

On this date in 1886, 32 young men of the royal court were burned to death for refusing to renounce their allegiance to Christ in favor of their king. Just as in the early days of the church, many were so impressed by the serene confidence of the martyrs that they too embraced the faith.

7 The Holy Trinity

First Sunday after Pentecost

It took a long time for believers to figure out the meaning of God being Three in One and then put it into words that everyone could agree on. The Nicene Creed was formulated in the year 325.

(Theologians still speculate about the Trinity, though; some of the ancient arguments about it still go on.) The texts appointed for the feast of the Holy Trinity are Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17.

11 Barnabas

This believer, a prominent Jew from the island of Cyprus, welcomed Paul even as the other followers of Jesus feared their former persecutor. He was sent to investigate news of Gentiles in Antioch turning to the Lord, and when he saw the grace of God in them, he rejoiced "for he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit." Later he traveled with Paul bringing more Gentiles to Christ and even speaking up for them in the Council of Jerusalem. Barnabas welcomed people who were unlike him, people whom others considered "less-than" or "other-than." What can his witness teach us today? The Scriptures appointed for Barnabas' day are Isaiah 42:5-12; Psalm 112; Acts 11:19-30, 13:1-3; Matthew 10:7-16.

14 Second Sunday after Pentecost

Today Jesus tells us that the reign of God is like seeds growing, though the gardener who planted them does not know how. Is Jesus telling us that we have our work to do and we can trust God to do God's? What do you think? The passages appointed for today are Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, [11-13], 14-17; Mark 4:26-34.

Third Sunday after Pentecost

The disciples in the boat with Jesus renewed their Bible—they would have known what God told Job in the passage we hear in today's first reading. That's why they were so filled with awe when Jesus stilled the waves: They knew Who did that kind of thing. Today's readings are Job 38:1–11; Psalm 107:1–3, 23–32; 2 Corinthians 6:1–13; Mark 9:35–41.

Father's Day

Thanks be to God today for fathers, grandfathers, fathers-in-law, godfathers, foster fathers, spiritual fathers, uncles, great-uncles, and big brothers too.

John the Baptist

Today's Gospel tells the story of John's birth and naming. His father Zechariah burst into prophetic song as he named his child; his song has long been part of morning prayer. It is often called the Benedictus from its first words, "Blessed be the Lord God." The texts appointed for the birth of John the Baptist are Malachi 3:1–4; Psalm 141; Acts 13:13–26; Luke 1:57–80.

Presentation of the Augsburg Confession

This is an important day in Lutheran history. On this date in 1530, the German and Latin editions of the Augsburg Confession were

presented to the emperor. It was written by Philipp Melancthon and endorsed by Martin Luther; it summarized the points that the reformers saw as either agreeing with or differing from beliefs and practices then current in the church.

25 Philipp Melancthon, renewer of the church

This brilliant scholar and friend of Martin Luther was the first professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg. His classes were so popular that even his early section had as many as 600 students—at 6 in the morning.

28 Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

The book of Lamentations was written very soon after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in the year 586 B.C. Scholars suggest that this poetic book was written by a

survivor who remained in the land after most of the people were killed or carried off in captivity. The poet describes the terrible suffering of the people vividly—and still trusts in God. How is the poet's trust reflected in today's Gospel reading? The texts appointed for today are Lamentations 3:22–33 or Wisdom 1:13–15, 2:23–24; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7–15; Mark 5:21–43.

29 Peter and Paul, apostles

Tradition tells us that the two great apostles were martyred on today's date in the year 64, Peter in the city of Rome (the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome is said to be built over his grave) and Paul outside the walls of that city. Today's texts are Acts 12:1–11; Psalm 87:1–3, 5–7; 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 17–18; John 21:15–19.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA

at the ELCA Youth Gathering July 22–26 in New Orleans

Women of the ELCA will be an exhibitor on the topic of health and wellness at the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering. The organization will reach thousands of young women and adult advisors, with a focus on healthy self-image through healthy relationships. They will be looking at the *LWT* summer Bible study as well as the July issue of *Café*. If you're at the Gathering, stop by to see us. If you're not there, please remember all those attending the Gathering in your prayers.


CONFIRMED IN COMMUNITY

by Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen

I was just about 14 years old in May of my eighth-grade year. It was Pentecost Sunday—though I don't think I realized that at the time. It was the day of my confirmation. As I think back on the day, the memories that stand out for me are not about deep issues of faith or what I had learned in two years of classes every Tuesday evening. Rather, I remember what I wore—a new blue dress and grown-up high heels for the first time. I remember that I was nervous standing in front of the congregation (those shoes—would I wobble, or worse, trip?). And I remember the moments of celebration. During worship, the congregation applauded us confirmands and we exchanged warm hugs during the passing of the peace of Christ. After church, there were endless congratulations in the receiving line, as well as cake and gifts presented by various members of the congregation. And that afternoon, there was even more celebrating at home with relatives and members of the congregation—more food, more cake, more conversation, more hugs. I remember the joy and I remember the community celebration.

The rite of public Affirmation of Baptism, often called confirmation, traditionally marks a transition point in our Christian lives. The rite encourages the community to recall things that are past and to look forward to new possibilities. Affirmation of Baptism is not just about the young people who stand before the congregation. The rite offers the whole community an occasion to come together to celebrate our





connectedness in the One through whom we are named children of God, Jesus Christ.

CELEBRATING A SHARED PROMISE

In the community of faith, we are essential members of the body of Christ. We are named by Holy Baptism as “children of God.” We share the joy and responsibility of shaping one another in the Christian faith. Affirmation of Baptism is a moment of public accountability and a celebration during a young person’s formation in the faith. It marks a milestone in the community that is shaping that journey as well.

When young people in the congregation publicly affirm the gifts God has given through baptism, the whole community recalls and celebrates gifts given both to the young person and the other members of the community. This is a time when we especially recognize our connectedness in the body of Christ.

The public nature of confirmation assumes the full involvement of the community. During the rite of Affirmation of Baptism, the voices of the congregation join with the voices of the confirmands—sharing the profession of faith in the Apostles’ Creed. Together, our common witness proclaims what we believe. When we say these words in community, the strong voices buoy up the tentative; those who are still learning are stead-

ied by the practiced cadence of those who know the creed by heart; each voice offers a unique nuance to the sound of the whole.

CELEBRATING A SHARED LIFE OF FAITH

After the confirmands profess their faith together with the whole community, they affirm the covenant God made with each one of them in Holy Baptism:

to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 236)

But this covenant is not theirs to carry all alone. The rite of affirmation continues by addressing the whole assembly:

People of God, do you promise to support these sisters and brothers and pray for them in their life in Christ?

We do, and we ask God to help and guide us.

The community also affirms the covenant God made with each one in Holy Baptism. Living among God’s people means walking in faith with one another: hearing the word of God and sharing in the Lord’s Sup-

per, proclaiming the good news of God in Christ in cooperative ministry, serving one another, and striving for justice and peace beyond the boundaries of the community gathered together in worship. In the rite, the congregation then turns to prayer for the whole community and for the individual confirmands. We pray in thanksgiving for the gifts the community has received through Holy Baptism.

Let us pray.

We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life.

The presider then prays for each confirmand that the gift of the Holy Spirit will be stirred up in his or her life.

LIVING OUT A SHARED MISSION

The rite of Affirmation of Baptism concludes with a note of celebration as the community joins voices with words of mutual encouragement:

Let us rejoice with these sisters and brothers in Christ.

We rejoice with you in the life of baptism. Together we will give thanks and praise to God and proclaim the good news to all the world.

We conclude with these words that

speak of the joy we share as the baptized community—the joy we are called to share with all the world as we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We are sent out, renewed in the assurance of God's love in Jesus Christ and rejuvenated in our commitment to participate in the mission we are called to in Jesus Christ.

As I think of the day of my confirmation at St. John's Lutheran Church in Victor, New York, my clearest memories are the moments of celebration with the faith community of which I knew that I was a part.

That community took their calling seriously both in celebration and in responsibility. Before and after the day of my confirmation, they shaped my life of faith. I continue to celebrate those who gathered around me on that day—and the days afterward, when those saints endured my difficult teenage years. They supported my parents in their struggle with my adolescent forays into independent life.

I give thanks for those saints who sacrificed their weekends to host the youth group, those who invited me to participate in various ministries, those who took the time to talk to a young person after Sunday worship.

I live with gratitude to those who encouraged my vocation as a musician—even on those Sundays when I filled in for the organist and

made huge mistakes. I am grateful for those who invited me to be a Sunday school teacher, and for those who cheered me into seminary.

Perhaps it is surprising to admit that I didn't remember the content of my catechetical classes on the day of my confirmation. Yet I realize now that those classes were but one step in a longer journey in which I continue to learn about the content and shape of my faith. The Affirmation of Baptism rite that summer was also simply one pause for celebration on the long journey of faith that I share with the whole community of Christ.

Many years later, I delight in every opportunity to affirm, or to witness another's affirming, the covenant God made with us in baptism. I anticipate how God will teach me and shape my faith through the gift of community in the body of Christ. And I take every opportunity to celebrate the fellowship we share together. ☪

The Rev. Jennifer Phelps Ollikainen is associate for worship resources at the ELCA churchwide offices. She lives with her husband, the Rev. Matthew Ollikainen, and their two children in Rolling Meadows, Ill.

TO READ

The service of Affirmation of Baptism can be found on pages 234-237 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, ©2006 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



LET US PRAY

Time to Play

by Debra K. Farrington

One of my favorite ways

to start a weekend retreat is with a certain guided meditation someone sent me years ago. With everyone sitting in a relaxed position and breathing deeply and quietly, I invite participants to imagine themselves near a cool mountain stream. They listen to the gurgling water, feel the crisp mountain air, and enjoy the feeling of being away from their everyday world.

Once everyone is nice and relaxed, I read the line that stops everything cold: "Look now at the water. The water is clear," I say quietly, "and you can easily see the face of the person whose head you are holding under the water. Look! It's the jerk who caused you all this stress!" Heads pop up, quiet breathing turns to gasps of surprise, and people wonder if they actually heard what they think they heard. Most are afraid to laugh until the first person giggles, and then the room explodes in laughter. I take that opportunity to remind people that retreats are not about being serious every moment. God delights in our laughter and our play as much as our serious contemplation.

I worked hard to learn this lesson. Some years ago a spiritual director who thought I was taking the world entirely too seriously suggested that I drop my spiritual practices for the summer and make *play* my prayer. I had absolutely no idea what she was talking about. None. Which was, indeed, evidence that I was not getting my minimum daily allowance of play.

So I put my usual spiritual practices aside for the summer and tried to relearn what it meant to play. I went to baseball games. I occasionally put aside my work and just hung out with friends. I read a bunch of lightweight summer books, the kind that don't require much focus. I went to concerts and outdoor summer theatre productions. In other words, I had a good time and found a better balance between work and play.

By the end of the summer I actually missed my regular spiritual practices, the same ones that had earlier felt like more tasks to be checked off on my to-do list. When I took them up again, it was with renewed energy and delight. They felt like special time with God, instead of something to get done and crossed off the list for the day.

So let me issue you the challenge my spiritual director issued to me: Take some time out to play this summer. Go to a ballgame. Play with a puppy or a kitten. If you've forgotten how to play, consult some children. Go to the beach and make a sand castle. Attend the county fair and ride the Ferris wheel or the roller coaster (if you're braver than I am). Go to a drive-in movie, or a square dance, or an outdoor theatre. Make play your spiritual practice for the summer by noticing the ways in which God is present—in others, in yourself, in the world around you—as you play, and by imagining God's enjoyment as you delight in creation. 🌸

Debra K. Farrington is a retreat leader and has written eight books of Christian spirituality.

It's tempting to think that if we could just get them back through the front door and sitting in a pew again, all will be well. We hope they'll fall back in love with the church that we love. But it's not that simple.

Getting young people to stay in church is a challenge for us all.

WILL THEY BE BACK?

by Rod G. Boriack



Have you heard the joke about pastors and the bats? Three pastors from different denominations used to get together to play golf every few weeks, and they'd tell each other their troubles along the airways. They all were having problems with bats in their churches' rafters. The Methodist preacher called an exterminator, but the bats came back within days. The Presbyterian minister tried trapping and releasing, but the number of bats doubled.

After sinking her putt, the Lutheran pastor smiled and said, "Our bats are gone and they haven't come back. We just baptized and confirmed them, and we haven't seen them since!"

The best humor touches real life in ways that make us want either to quirm a little or shout "Amen!" This old joke gets lots of both as we lament how our young people are disappearing from our pews. The reality of where they go is far more complicated, and worrisome, than the bat joke.

WHERE DID THEY GO?

The Barna Group and other Christian research organizations find that about 10 percent of teenagers are engaged in the life of the church to some degree, but among young adults, that figure drops to 20 percent.

Church leaders have grown in understanding how to engage high-school-age young people in meaningful ministry and congregational

life after confirmation. Nowadays the practice of congregational youth ministry most often stretches across the years of middle school through the end of high school, but what happens after high school is a bit more challenging for us.

Until recently, we quietly nodded as young people drifted out of our churches. We believed that they would return to Lutheran congregations later in their adult lives as committed, faithful members.

Some time after confirmation or after graduating out of the high-school youth group, young people would fly the nest, going off to college or career, indulging their freedom and independence, exploring life and the world, and pondering their faith. "There they go," we'd say, shaking our heads. But we believed they'd be back to get married, join a church committee, baptize and confirm their children, and help us meet our budget goals.

It seemed to work that way for many years. But times were different then, with more of an emphasis on loyalty and tradition. The culture has changed.

Research has illuminated a difficult reality for most mainline denominations, including Lutherans: A significant number of young people do not return to the church, and even if they do, it's not necessarily to a congregation of the denomination they grew up in.

Our assumption that "they'll be back" is no longer safe. It's possible that many won't be back. We've suspected this for a decade or two, but we continue to scratch our heads over what to do about it.

It's tempting to think that if we could just get them back through the front door and sitting in a pew again, all will be well. We hope they'll fall back in love with the church that we love. But it's not that simple. Getting young people to stay in church is a challenge for us all.

DIFFERENT STORIES, COMMON THREADS

There is no *one* reason why young adults are not present or active in our congregations and ministries. You can't attribute their absence entirely to rebellion or spiritual indifference. Nor is there a mass exodus from the church. Listen to the young people around you and in your community, and you'll be blessed with rich stories that are unique, yet related. Common threads include: the longing for relationship, the need to discern God's purpose for their lives, and a desire to connect their lives with their faith. The differences are also profound and telling.

Let me introduce you to a few young people who have stories to tell and who present challenges for the church as we attempt to get them back into a congregation.

Jen feels pressure to fit in.

Jen is a hairdresser and loves to talk. She's 22, grew up in the church, and talks about her Christian faith without hesitation. But she has not been active in church since high school. What keeps her away is the feeling that she is being pressured to comply with expectations that she can't meet—like join a Bible study group, be in worship every Sunday morning, dress a certain way, tithe, and agree with particular church practices and theological issues. Jen has a lot of questions and ideas about church she'd like to discuss openly. But when people (even her own family) invite her to church, she senses that the invitation comes with too many strings attached.

For Shanna, life is constantly changing.

Once high school was over, Shanna signed up for military service. Her life now is constantly changing and moving. Joining a congregation isn't on her radar screen, even though she has been an active Lutheran from the day she was born. Shanna and a couple of friends attend worship services on base led by various chaplains. She is active in finding ways to nurture her faith, but not in ways that are visible to most people.

Raphael is active and hungry for more opportunity.

Raphael has been active in the Lutheran Youth Organization as a leader and constantly seeks out opportunities for serving the church. He attends his home church sporadically because he's enrolled in college in another state. When he's at school, he is active with the Lutheran campus ministry and some other local ministries. Raphael thinks about his future life in the church and wonders if he will find a congregation where he can be involved in leadership and use his gifts and interests for ministry.

Megan is looking for relevance and understanding.

Megan was connected to her congregation and youth ministry until the end of high school. But when she moved out on her own, her work life and social life consumed her in a way she felt could only be understood by her young adult working peers. The local churches didn't seem to be there for her when she struggled to find a job, looked for an apartment she could afford, needed to talk to someone about stress, or sought encouragement as a new parent. Now in her late 20s, Megan attends a small nondenominational church where there are other young adults and single mothers trying to make ends meet. They help each other when times are tough and pool their resources, believing that sharing and caring for each other is what the gospel is about.

Chris is faithful in unseen ways.

Chris attended an ELCA Youth Gathering when he was in high school and later volunteered for the event when he was in college. He took some time off from school to serve in a Lutheran volunteer organization, and eventually felt drawn to serve year-round in an ELCA outdoor ministry. Chris' life has been connected with many congregations, and, at the same time, he has found it difficult to be a member of any one congregation. As is the case with some young adults, he may seem absent and disconnected from the church, but in reality he is busy at the center of its mission and ministry in the world.

STORIES CAN GUIDE YOU

The stories of young people are diverse and amazing. Sometimes they are heartbreaking. Sometimes they give us hope and strength. When you wonder why young people are absent from worship or the activities of your congregation, reach out into your community and talk with some of them . . . especially those who have not been in your church. When you talk with them, consider these guidelines:

- Listen closely, without judgment.
- Ask questions and be curious.
- Accept and respect their stories and life experiences, even though they may not be what you want to hear.
- Look for clues in their stories about what it means to be related children of a gracious God.
- Reflect on what they entrust to you and let it serve as cues to your congregation as it faces the challenges of being faithful and creative in both mission and ministry.
- As a result of what you hear, advocate for congregational changes that take into consideration the diversity of ages, cultures, life experiences, abilities, and family configurations.

The act of seeking each other out and listening to each other's stories can bridge the gaps between us. Any sense of absence, distance, or brokenness begins to diminish as we see each other as beloved

members of the body of Christ with all our differences, gifts, flaws, and experiences. Unexpected and unimagined doors and opportunities can open up.

This might sound vague—and a little too warm and fuzzy. But I can't think of a better way to shake things up than to ask questions and really listen to the answers. When we open up ourselves, we begin to discover the heart and soul of young people and their concerns. You can think later about resources, staff, programs, budgets, volunteers, strategies, meeting space, Web sites, and all the other practical issues. Congregations may discover that some things that had seemed important for ministry are no longer priorities, and that new visions and resources have emerged.

A VISION OF BEING PRESENT

Once I was at a meeting to discuss the mission of a congregation and its relationship with the surrounding community. At the other end of the long table I noticed a woman, almost 90, talking to a 20-year-old woman. The older woman gently took the younger woman's hand and pulled her arm toward her. With an outstretched finger, she traced the outline of a small tattoo on the young woman's forearm and said, "Beautiful. Was there a special reason you chose this?" That began

an interesting informal conversation. Later, those of us at the table began to share our hopes, dreams, and questions about what and who God might be calling us to do and be in that place.

This is the vision I hold onto when I wonder about young people and our aging church. I trust that God is at work creating and recreating the church as a community into which we are invited, whatever our age or circumstance. 🌿

Rod Boriack is assistant director for youth ministries for the ELCA's vocation and education area.



Women of the ELCA has a resource especially geared to reaching out to young women—Café, our online monthly publication. Go to www.boldcafe.org to see what it's all about. Then share the link with the young women you know. Promote it in your congregation's newsletter and worship bulletin. Check out the issue on "Evites, invites and other ways to welcome" at www.boldcafe.org/0410/hottopic.html.



HEALTH WISE

Shingles: The Chickenpox Comeback

by Molly M. Ginty

It looked at first like a

harmless rash. But it caused a month of itching, burning, stabbing pain.

When Marijke Vroomen-Durning developed shingles—caused by the same virus as chickenpox—she thought the scaly bumps on her back were eczema stemming from excessively dry skin.

“Like other shingles patients, I’d had chickenpox when I was younger,” says Vroomen-Durning, a writer in Montreal, Canada. “But I never expected the virus to return as shingles in my 40s, so I didn’t seek treatment immediately.”

Because Vroomen-Durning missed the 72-hour window within which medication can stop shingles in its tracks, her rash became a band of angry red blisters that stretched from the middle of her back around to her belly following the nerve pathway around her waist. The outbreak (which affects nerves as well as the skin) caused Vroomen-Durning so much pain that she couldn’t wear regular clothes. “For weeks, I dragged around the house in my pajamas, and was so fatigued that I had to sleep during the day,” she says.

Though shingles cost Vroomen-Durning four weeks of her routine, experts say the virus can be far worse. “In 20 percent of patients—particularly those who are older or whose immune systems are compromised—shingles can lead to nerve damage called postherpetic neuralgia, or PHN,” says Dr. Anne Louise Oaklander, an associate professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School. “The affected nerves become so sensitive

that just feeling a mild breeze on your skin can be intolerable. This pain can last for months, even years.”

Named for the Latin word *cingulum* or “belt,” because its rash typically goes partially around the torso, shingles strikes 15 to 20 percent of people at some point in their lifetimes and has the highest annual incidence of any neurological disease. Affecting one million Americans per year, it can wreak so much suffering and damage that being able to recognize its symptoms—and seek treatment quickly—is crucial.

“My shingles case started as a small patch of blisters behind one ear, and luckily stayed that way,” says Jessica Brown, an editor in New York City. “Because I saw my doctor right away and got medication to prevent the rash from spreading, the blisters dried up within three days, and I only felt tired for a week.”

How can chickenpox return in later life—and return with a vengeance? Shingles is caused by the same *varicella zoster* virus that causes most people to get a scattering of itchy chickenpox sores during childhood. A cousin of the virus that causes herpes and cold sores, *varicella zoster* can hide out in the nerves for years after chickenpox passes. Decades later when age, illness, or medications compromise the immune system, the virus can return and trigger a red itchy rash along affected nerve pathways. Blisters erupt in a confined patch. There is less itching—but more pain and fatigue—than with the earlier outbreak.

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

Fever. Chills. Headache. Stomach upset. Shooting pain in one area. These symptoms can come before shingles blisters arrive, when a full-blown attack can still be prevented.

One side of the neck. Right shoulder blade. The spot above one eye. The top of the left thigh, but not the right. Shingles blisters strike areas like these, breaking out on just one side of the body.

If you develop these symptoms, you should avoid people who haven't had chickenpox or shingles so that you don't pass the virus on to them. Especially vulnerable are women in the earliest stages of pregnancy, when shingles exposure is treatable and less dangerous than chickenpox exposure, but can still potentially affect a baby's health.

After a shingles diagnosis, your doctor may give you antiviral drugs that reduce shingles' duration and severity: acyclovir (Zovirax), valacyclovir (Valtrex), or famciclovir (Famvir). These medications can halve your risk of developing postherpetic neuralgia, while tricyclic drugs such as amitriptyline and Nortriptyline can treat PHN itself.

For the itching and burning of shingles rashes, a host of remedies can help. Prescription treatments include corticosteroids such as prednisone (which reduce inflammation), narcotics such as opioids (which relieve pain), and skin patches with anesthetics such as lidocaine or xylocaine (which numb itching skin). Over-the-counter options include hydrocortisone cream; cool, wet compresses; creams made with capsaicin (a substance found in chili peppers); cool

baths with baking soda or colloidal oatmeal; and nonprescription anti-inflammatory drugs (such as Advil or Motrin).

The best medications, say experts, are the vaccines you can take to prevent shingles before it even starts. The chickenpox vaccine (called

Varivax) can be administered to children or adults and can prevent chickenpox and shingles in both groups. The shingles vaccine (Zostavax) is recommended for people over 60 and reduces their risk of shingles by 50 to 60 percent while slashing their risk of PHN by 70 percent.

Another effective way to ward off shingles? Looking after the people you love. "Women get shingles at an older age than men, and epidemiologists think the reason for this is that women more frequently serve as caregivers for children with chickenpox," says Oaklander. "Contrary to what happens with most diseases, if you've already had chickenpox and take care of someone who has chickenpox or shingles, this will boost your own immunity to the shingles virus and lessen your personal risk." 🌸

Molly M. Ginty lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Women's eNews*.





DO NOT BE AFRA
I DARE YOU!

by Tana Kjos

WHAT'S THE BOLDEST THING YOU HAVE EVER DONE?

That's a question I have asked hundreds of people across the United States and Canada. When I ask them to share their answers with someone else in the room, it always catches them a little off guard. But soon they are getting up and making their way across the room to tell and to hear.

I have learned a lot from their answers. I have heard that sometimes you do bold things because you are in love. Sometimes it's because you have no other options. Sometimes the bold thing didn't seem bold at the time. It only seemed bold as you look back on it. Sometimes you make a move and after taking the step think, "Holy smokes! What did I get myself into?"

What I have learned from listening to all these stories is that we all have done something we can call bold. Every single one of us, in one way or another, has been a person of courage and daring.

Take my friend Tammy, for example. She spent 25 years in corporate America—25 years giving herself to her work, her company—and then she lost her job. Laid off. These days, layoffs are part of our daily headlines—GM, Microsoft, Caterpillar, ING—no place is off limits.

It could have been easy for Tammy to feel angry. Twenty-five years is a long time to commit to anything, especially one company. Instead, my friend seized this transition time and asked herself questions about what she loved. Questions about what gave her energy. What gave her purpose? What gifts did she have to share? What passions did she want to engage?

JUMPING IN WITH BOTH FEET

She took a good look at herself and the community she cared about and jumped into a new life with both feet. Instead of being angry or scared out of her wits, Tammy said getting laid off was the best thing that had ever happened to her. She took a bold step and opened a little wine shop where her customers are as important as the wine on the shelves and far more complex. She opened a place where her passions—wine, hospitality, people, laughter, love—merged.

Every time I step into her shop, people are getting to know one another. In that little shop Tammy owns, I have met a lot of new friends and seen walls come down between people between whom it would be so easy to draw lines. On

the history-making night we elected a new president, people of every race, political view, and economic standing were getting to know each other in her little shop.

It was an amazing night, but this amazing place is run by a person who wants to make a difference in her community.

ONE BIG DARE

In some ways, it seems, all of life today is a big dare. The economy is in crisis. Job security is at an all-time low. Churches are shrinking. Money is tight. And companies that seemed so secure not long ago are facing huge downsizing. Sometimes you wonder whether life is worth getting out of bed. And yet, when I see Tammy and others like her who are living courageous lives, I feel like I'm in the midst of modern-day versions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who actually listened when God said, "Do not be afraid."

Mary is not the only person to hear the words "Do not be afraid." Those words appear many times in the Bible. If you do a quick on-line Bible search, you'll find nearly 80 places where that phrase or a similar one is spoken. God says it to Abraham, who had a pretty scary journey ahead of him (Genesis 15:1) and to Hagar, who had every reason to feel alone and terrified of her future (Genesis 21:17). Moses used these words to embolden the

people, who didn't know whether it was more frightening to stay in slavery or venture into freedom, over and over again (Exodus 14:13; 20:20). The phrase shows up again and again in the books of Joshua, Kings, and Chronicles as the people encounter enemies on every side. You can find it when the people are enduring defeat and exile.

Faced with imprisonment, beatings, and rejection, Paul hears these words in a vision from the Lord and they give him courage to "speak, and not be silent" (Acts 18:9). It should come as some comfort to us that even the people in Scripture were often afraid and needed some reassurance!

GOD WORKS THROUGH US

Answering God's call is scary business. God has a purpose for our lives, a purpose much bigger than we are. God is on a mission to bless and save the whole world! And God has always worked in and through ordinary people, like you and me, in order to get God's work done. Because the work God is doing is bigger than us, sometimes it feels scary. In fact, the biblical stories show us that one way to know whether or not it is *God* calling us to do something is this: *God almost always asks us to do something we can't do on our own.*

Have you ever had the feeling you were supposed to do some-

thing you didn't want to do or go somewhere you didn't want to go because it would demand more energy, time, resources than you felt you had to spare? But you did it anyway because, somehow, you knew God was calling you? I know that feeling!

God calls us into a life that is beyond our wildest imagination and even dares us to laugh like Sarah at the craziness of it all. God calls us to make peace and do justice, to give generously and love freely. And, just like Mary, God calls us to be a blessing to the world. God calls us to work bigger than we can accomplish by ourselves.

On the other hand, when God calls, God calls *us*! God doesn't expect us to be something other than who we are. God knows what we're capable of—our passions, gifts, talents, and resources—and God puts *us* to use. I think the angel told Mary "Do not be afraid," for example, because God was calling Mary to just be *Mary*.

Mary was a strong young woman who had the ability to be a mom. And that's just what God's story needed. I mean, it's not like the angel showed up asking Joseph to bear this child! Now don't get me wrong, Mary was just maybe the most important mother in history. And her circumstances were undeniably unusual. But Mary was a woman who was able to have

child and who would prove to be a pretty good mom.

God always calls us to be a part of something much bigger than ourselves for the sake of blessing the world. But God always calls us to be who we are. Jesus called fishermen to fish for people. Paul used his skills as a tent maker to make a living as he traveled around starting house churches all over the place. The merchant Lydia used her wealth and connections to support the earliest missionaries and host a fledgling church in her own home. Esther came to understand that she had been made queen to save and protect her people at just the right time. God calls us to be who we are, on purpose, for the sake of making a difference in the world. That's how it has always been.

My friend Tammy has a little bit of what Mary had and a little bit of what God has put in each of us: desire and the ability to make a difference in the world. She is grasping what it means to have a calling instead of settling for just a job. She is daring to be herself—really and truly *herself*—in ways that are useful to God.

Every one of us knows what it's like to be daring. We do bold things for all kinds of reasons! But living a bold life on purpose, a life like Mary's, begins with knowing that God is calling you to participate in something bigger than yourself.

God wants you to be a part of blessing, saving, loving, healing, reconciling and setting free all of creation so that we can really see glimpses of the kingdom that God has promised is near.

Scary? Yes. But remember: God doesn't expect you to be someone you're not. You can live out God's purpose for your life at home, at work, in the corner coffee shop, wherever you find yourself. You are participating in God's purpose each time you smile at your kids, look at the person who took your order and really mean it when you ask how she is, pick up that piece of trash floating down the sidewalk and throw it away, take time to finally meet your neighbor, or engage in some meaningful conversation over lunch at work. You are participating in what God is up to every time you dare to be *you* and intentionally put your gifts, passions, talents, and resources into God's service.

Mary had a baby. That really wasn't out of the ordinary. What made it a big deal was that she dared to live on purpose, using what she had to make a difference, as a part of God's mission to bless and save the world.

Who are you? What is it about you that God is calling into action? What gift, what passion, what asset, and even what need? God is calling you, *all* of you, every part. Do not be afraid! You have exactly what

you need to participate in God's mission to bless the world.

What are you waiting for? I dare you! 🌿

Tana M. Kjos has a master's degree in mission and leadership from Luther Seminary and 15 years' experience leading organizations into renewal. She is the co-founder and creative director of A.R.E.: A Renewal Enterprise, doing consulting and leadership coaching for faith-based, non-profit, and for-profit values-based organizations of all sizes. For more information visit www.ARenewalEnterprise.com.

LEARN MORE

Want to learn more about what God has in store for you? Check out some of these resources.

The author, Tana Kjos, tells the story of Tammy in her article. You can read more about vocations in her new book, which will be released by Augsburg Fortress later this year: *Reclaiming the V Word*, written with Dave Daubert.

I Am She, a free downloadable Women of the ELCA workbook about discovering your bold. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org to download the resource.

Read *Listen! God is Calling: Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work*, written by D. Michael Bennethum; available from Augsburg Fortress at www.augsburgfortress.org or call 800-328-4648.



MARY: A WOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS

SESSION 1

The Annunciation

by Christa von Zychlin

BIBLE STUDY

Theme Verse

The Angel Gabriel to Mary, Luke 1:28,
from *The Message*

“Good morning!
You’re beautiful with God’s beauty.
Beautiful inside and out!
God be with you.”

Opening

Hymn

“People Look East,” *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 248
or *With One Voice* 626, verse 2

Reading

Luke 1:26–38

Prayer

Ever-living God,
we thank you for this gathering around your word.
We bless and praise you for creating us as women,
and for anointing each season of our lives
with your Holy and creative Spirit.
Today as we begin our study of Mary,
the mother of Jesus,
we thank you for her youthful openness
to the wonders of your will.
Help us to be open to your word for our lives

that we may grow in love of you and of one another,
and be of service
to the world you love so much.
In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Introduction to the Annunciation

READ PSALM 121:1–2. What are the two main characteristics
of the LORD in these well-loved verses?

It makes perfect sense that the church commemorates
the Annunciation (the day the angel Gabriel came to
announce Jesus’ birth to Mary) on March 25. First of
all, that’s exactly nine months before the celebration of
the birth of Jesus. While the conception of God’s Son
was a miracle, Mary’s pregnancy itself seems to have
progressed according to the usual order of creation.
She had a full nine months of literally growing with
the Lord.

But I also like this date for the Annunciation not
only for its arithmetic, but because where I’ve lived
most of my life—in the northern part of the United
States—the earth is usually still bare and frozen at the
end of March. While in some years, the snowdrops are
in white bloom, in most years there is no hope at all to
be seen, other than (if you squint just so) some swelling
buds on the maples or a yellowish cast to the willows.

So it might have seemed to the people of Mary’s
time. Hope was bare and frozen for God’s people
who lived on a hilly strip of land called Judea, lorde

er by the great power of the Roman Empire, whose ally appointed King Herod was corrupt and cruel. And yet, just like the buds in earliest spring, God's life forces were stirring. God's power was about to be made known in a teenager's courage to take on an audacious assignment.

Think back to the time you were just beginning to approach womanhood, at the age of 10 or 12 or so. Where were you living? What do you remember about your bedroom? What excited you about the idea of becoming a teenager? What, if anything, made you apprehensive? What was your relationship to God like at that age?

Hopes and Dreams

READ EXODUS 1:22—2:4. Who watches to see what will happen to the baby Moses in the basket?

READ NUMBERS 26:59. What was the name of Moses' sister?

READ EXODUS 15:20—21. What title is Moses' and Aaron's sister given in these verses?

READ LUKE 1:26—27. What is the virgin's name?

Mary is a very ordinary name. According to a Google search I did recently, the name Mary (along with its variations such as Marie and Miriam) is still the single most popular name in the world.

Variations of Mary such as Mariano or the use of Maria as a middle name has been a popular choice for boys too, especially in Spanish-speaking cultures, but also in other places. One of the most famous German-language poets for example, has the name of Rainer Maria Rilke, and for years I was pleased that a female poet had such a high standing in German literature, only to find out that Rainer Maria is actually a man.

Do you or does anyone in your family have the name Mary or one of its variations as a first or middle name? How many Marys are there in the group gathered today? In your congregation?

Mary was an ordinary name in the days of Jesus. In fact, there are at least five different Marys in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, though, we hear about only one Mary or Miriam. She is the young girl who helped rescue her brother Moses from murder.

The name Miriam, and its shorter version, Mary, means bitter waters, from the Hebrew word *mar* which means bitterness, together with the word *yam* which means sea: *mara yam* = bitter sea.

The sea was a horribly bitter place for the Israelites enslaved in Egypt in the Old Testament, since it was into its waters that their hope—their baby sons—were thrown. In biblical times, as in many parts of the world today, the Jewish people had the custom of naming children after the circumstances of their birth.

In the early days of the New Testament, times were hard and people were poor in a way reminiscent of the long-ago days of slavery in Egypt. Life under King Herod could be very bitter. So it's no wonder that many families in New Testament times named their daughters Mary, "bitter waters." But maybe parents were also filled with a dream that their daughter, like Miriam in the ancient days of the Exodus, would be a girl brave enough to play a similar crucial role in the rescue, the salvation of her people.

Were you named after someone, and if so, what qualities did that person have that your parents may have hoped you would have too?

A 700-Year-Old Prophecy

READ ISAIAH 7:10—14. What does the LORD tell Ahaz to do? When Ahaz refuses to do what the LORD asks, what does the LORD do anyway?

READ MATTHEW 1:18—23. What differences do you notice between the exact words of the Isaiah prophecy and the way the words are interpreted in Matthew 1:23?

More than 700 years before Mary's encounter with the Angel Gabriel, the prophet Isaiah presented a message to the royal house of David, involving a sign that King Ahaz never asked for and never wanted. King Ahaz wasn't quite honest when he protested, "I will not put the LORD to the test" (Isaiah 7:12b). He wasn't so worried about his spiritual relationship with the LORD, it appears, as much as he was intent on forging his own political alliances without interference from God or anybody else.

Nevertheless, Isaiah gave King Ahaz the prophecy that God had commanded. At the time, these words were probably not considered so remarkable. Isaiah uses the word *alma* in this passage, a word which usually refers to a maiden, a young unmarried woman, which in ancient Middle Eastern context would have meant that she *was* a virgin. The original hearers probably thought that this *alma* was a virgin at the time the prophecy was given, but not at the time she conceived and gave birth. Most biblical scholars believe that the prophecy had a preliminary fulfillment soon afterward, in the conception and birth of King Hezekiah, one of the few righteous kings of the Davidic line.

King Ahaz thought his greatest legacy would be his great political and military maneuverings! Instead, his reign left the country in shambles. His son Hezekiah, however, brought new hope to the people of God.

READ MATTHEW 1:1 AND 1:9. Now that we've studied the context of the Isaiah prophecy, which names in this genealogy suddenly pop out at you?

When the Hebrew words of Isaiah's prophecy were translated into Greek two or three centuries before Mary's birth, the word *alma*, "young woman, maiden," was translated as *parthenos*, "virgin." Now Isaiah's ancient prophecy took on a new expectation, and it appears that in the years before the birth of Jesus, there was already a hope circulating among the Jewish people for a miraculous birth from a virgin.

What other phrases in Scripture can have one meaning when first heard, and then a deeper meaning many years later? Can you think of a spiritual truth that your parents or a pastor or Sunday school teacher taught you that you didn't quite understand then but that now makes more sense than ever?

A Virgin, Expectant

READ DEUTERONOMY 22:23–24. Notice that a virgin who is engaged is referred to as a "wife" in verse 24.

READ LUKE 1:34–35. What does Mary's question to the angel reveal about her understanding of the facts of life?

READ MATTHEW 1:18–20. Why did Joseph plan to end his engagement to Mary?

Every year in confirmation class, amidst much giggling, I make sure that the seventh-grade boys and girls know what the word *virgin* means.

A virgin is, of course, someone who has never had sexual intercourse. It may also refer to youth, inexperience, or naiveté. Used for clay, *virgin* means it's not been fired yet. It's pliable, but not very durable. Used for olive oil, it means the oil from the first pressing of the olives, resulting in the most flavorful oil. When it's used for wool, it means the fiber has never been spun or woven, making fabric that is both finer and stronger than cloth from recycled wool.

To a young woman living in first-century Palestine however, the word *virgin* involved a matter of life or death. Marriage then (as it is still practiced in many traditional societies in the world today) was a two-step process. The first step was the engagement, when the agreement was made between two families. Historically, this meant that the woman now belonged to her fiancé's household, even though she still lived in her parents' household. The second step was when the woman moved into her husband's home.

In Mary's day, the interval between engagement and moving day would be used by a family to make

re that their daughter was informed about the facts of e, to prepare her for her new responsibilities as a wife and a mother, and for both parties to gather furnishings and livestock with which to start married life.

When and how did you learn the facts of life? How do Christian families today prepare their sons and daughters for future marriage and family life? Does the youth group or confirmation program at your church include discussions of marriage, family life, or sexuality?

In any case, whatever Mary's parents hoped for her, surely wouldn't have been this, for her to become a pregnant teenager. It is even more unlikely that either her father or her fiancé would have been prepared for her to become a mother. It is a miracle that she was still a virgin!

Mary herself obviously knows her basic biology, and she gets right to the point to ask her heavenly messenger just how this was all going to work out. The literal translation of the phrase "I am a virgin" in Luke 1:34b is "I do not know a man," which is, of course, the biblical phrase meaning, "I haven't had sex with a man." But beyond the question of biology we can guess that there were other questions in Mary's mind: How am I going to survive this? How will my parents, my future husband, my community react? Why me? Am I hallucinating this whole thing?

Prophet's Calling

READ JEREMIAH 1:4–9. Compare and contrast the young prophet Jeremiah's call with the young virgin Mary's call. How may Mary's youth actually have helped her to accept this shocking commission from God? Can you identify any young women (or young men) in your family or in your congregation who have a special way of communicating God's truth and grace?

With courage unbelievable, with strength and resolute-ness, this not-yet-fired clay pot, this delicate oil, this fine

and strong young woman, a virgin, says her bold "yes" to God. Mary agrees to be a bearer of God's word, this time in a way that only a woman could possibly be.

The lyric poet I talked about earlier, Rainer Maria Rilke, put it this way:

If you had really wanted to be strong,
You would not have come from a woman's womb.
For messiahs are quarried from mountains
Where the sturdy and strong comes from stone.

Instead of being sent to a high mountain summit, or to the marbled chambers of a king's palace, the angel of the Lord was sent to a little house in Nazareth, to a young woman named Mary.

And bitter waters became springs of fresh joy.

Closing

Read Psalm 126 aloud together, and then pray this prayer for the Annunciation of Our Lord (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 55, or *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 33):

Pour your grace into our hearts, O God,
that we who have known the incarnation
of your Son, Jesus Christ,
announced by an angel,
may by his cross and passion
be brought to the glory of his resurrection;
for he lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen. 🌸

The Rev. Christa von Zychlin has just celebrated her half-century birthday by running a marathon and then moving to Asia with her husband and youngest son; to serve with ELCA Global Mission in Hong Kong, China. Now serving the church on a fourth continent (having previously served in Ohio, Africa, Iowa, Germany, France, and Wisconsin), she invites you to share in her current adventures at <http://marathonangel.blogspot.com>

SESSION 1

The Annunciation

by Christa von Zychlin

Prayerful Preparation

Welcome to this summer Bible study and thank you for your willingness to lead! Maybe you're one of those treasured experienced churchwomen who said, "Sure, I'll lead the summer study again." And everybody breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that the study of the biblical Mary would be in capable hands.

Or maybe you're going to lead a Bible study for the first time, and right about now, to take the words of Mary's cousin Elizabeth out of context, you're thinking, "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" (Luke 1:43)

In whichever season of leadership you find yourself, take a moment of quiet time in preparation for this first session. If you have some favorite music that speaks to you of hope or of youth, then play that to help you get centered. Light a candle, get out your Bible, and read through the main focus of the first session: Luke 1:26–38.

Now, re-read the last two verses of this passage, and allow the biblical words to anoint your prayer: *May God work through me to bring the word of life to each participant in this summer study. Amen.*

Practical Preparation—In Advance

People feel more committed and involved when they are asked to help with specific tasks, so please don't take care of every item on this list by yourself.

Logistics: Determine the place(s), dates, and times for the summer study, taking particular care to plan the length of time to be dedicated to each of the three sessions. You might consider offering this summer study

as part of a one-day retreat, as described in the May issue of *LWT* and at www.lutheranwomantoday.org.

Publicity: Write up an invitation for your church newsletter, bulletin, and e-mail announcements. Appoint someone to make an engaging announcement in church (or get creative and do a one-minute musical, drama, or video announcement!). Send out personal invitations or telephone calls to all the women of your congregation and send invitations to other congregations in town too.

Make a special point of inviting college-age women and high-school girls. The study of this biblical woman in different stages of life will be richer for all if women in different stages of life participate. And make sure that every invitation reminds women to invite others.

Refreshments: Arrange for snacks that include healthy alternatives. If you can, recruit musicians for the devotional portion of each session. This might be a pianist or flutist, or simply someone with a sure voice to lead the singing.

Ask someone to bring in visuals. Art books from the library or an Internet search on "The Annunciation" will offer hundreds of images. This may be an opportunity to involve a high school or college student to give a 10-minute presentation for the group.

Practical Preparation—Day of the Study

Do you have seats for everyone, leaving several chairs open for latecomers?

Enough copies of the Bible study session to go around? (You can download them for free from the

gazine's Web site: www.lutheranwomantoday.org.)

Name tags and markers so that no one is embarrassed by not knowing someone's name?

Worship books, such as the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* or *Lutheran Book of Worship*?

Opening

You begin on time, people will be more likely to arrive on time the following sessions. Warmly welcome each participant. Even if only one woman comes, let her know you're glad she's there!

Invite participants to read the theme verse together, followed by singing the suggested hymn or another hymn of your choice.

Read Luke 1:26–38. Consider making this a dramatic reading by marking different parts for Narrator, Angel, and Mary. Then pray.

Notes on the Study

The boxed sections of Session 1 are meant to have short answers. The discussion questions are meant to promote insight and sharing. You will probably not have time to do everything. Move rapidly and systematically through the boxed sections in order to allow a little more time for the discussions. Feel free to skip several of the questions in order to get to the two or three that you feel deserve more exploration.

Introduction to the Annunciation

Psalms 121:1–2. God is both Divine Creator (who made heaven and earth) and Intimate Helper (*my* helper).

Question 2: Give the group a minute to think, then ask each woman to *briefly* describe a specific furnishing in her preteen home, or one thing she looked forward to about becoming a teenager. You might set the pace with something like this: “When I was 12, my bedroom had orange shag carpeting, and I was looking forward to high school because I sure didn’t like middle school!”

Hopes and Dreams

We see Miriam as first a young girl watching over a baby, then as a woman who is called to be a prophet and sings a song of joy. The similarity to Mary extends beyond their shared name!

A 700-Year-Old Prophecy

In the new *Book of Faith* initiative of the ELCA, study materials underscore the ways that Scripture interprets Scripture. Materials also offer insights into how the history and context of the times the Bible was written work together with the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. The result is God’s timeless word fresh for each generation. Go to www.bookoffaith.org to learn more about this initiative and resources.

A Virgin, Expectant

You may wish to read Deuteronomy 22:13–22 for a fascinating and vivid account of the historical and cultural value placed on virginity.

Some people are more comfortable talking about such matters than others. You can move quickly through this section; make sure that the discussion doesn’t get sidetracked or monopolized.

A Prophet’s Calling

You might use newsprint or a whiteboard and markers to list the similarities and differences between Jeremiah and Mary. The list of similarities should include:

Both are young.

Both questioned God’s choice.

Both are told, “Do not be afraid.”

God puts the Word inside both.

Closing

Read the Psalm 126 together and ask someone to lead the prayer. Before the group breaks up, remind them of the time and place of the next session. 🌸



The following is an excerpt from Joan Chittister's 2006 book, *The Friendship of Women: The Hidden Tradition of the Bible*.

Elizabeth Acceptance

by Joan Chittister

"In my friend," Isabel Norton wrote, "I find a second self." The comment brings us up straight. How many of those are there? Not many, surely. And what does that mean for the rest of the people in our lives whom we call "friend"? The statement becomes a rubric for telling one kind of relationship from another, for making an important distinction between a "friendly" and a "friendship" relationship. Best friends, very close friends, close friends, social

acquaintances, and casual acquaintance are not the same thing.

Women know the difference among relationships and treat all of them accordingly. Those who are really "a second self" are easily identified. These friends, our "second selves," are the ones from

whom we ask no explanations on whom we pass no judgments. They are those whose struggles and stumblings, needs and responses we know like we know our own. Others we may spend time with whom we may enjoy, we may join with in common projects, but with them



do not expose our hearts in the hope of finding healing hands.

Most of all, our real friends are the ones who take us into their lives with the ease of family and the warmth of love. They have no sarcastic comments to make of us, no subtle but clear criticisms to make of our presence for our sake, no anxious remarks to make to others about us. They offer what women everywhere look for most in a relationship: encouragement, support, and a sense that they themselves are worthwhile human beings. Real friends are simply there for us, no matter the pressure, no matter the pain. They are home for us when no other home is open.

It's not that friends justify our failures; it is simply that they do not even notice them. Failure has nothing to do with what they see in us. Failure has nothing to do with what we do or do not disclose to them. To a real friend, whatever sins we have are simply the lessons we've learned along the way to becoming the best in us. There is no absolution needed. Where acceptance is the idiom of the heart, everything translates into understanding. A real friend, the second self, is cut from the cloth of Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was the cousin to whom Mary of Nazareth went, betrothed, yes, but unmarried, and pregnant to

someone other than Joseph "before they came together." It was a major issue, both religious and social. To be pregnant and unmarried in the Jewish community of the time was not simply to risk disapproval, it was to risk death. It was certainly to be shunned. But Elizabeth, contrary to all tradition, against all common sense, took Mary into her home, no questions asked, no verdict levied.

More than that, Elizabeth recognized in Mary the great gain that would eventually come from a situation that looked like such great loss to everyone else. Elizabeth accepted Mary for who she was, and she saw the goodness in her. Literally. Immediately.

Elizabeth's power in friendship is a fierce commitment to hold on with hope to the spiritual fecundity of a friend. However dark, however debilitating the circumstances with which the friend may be grappling at the moment, Elizabeth knows that in the end will come goodness because goodness is of the essence of the one we love as we love ourselves.

Acceptance is the ability to receive with a listening heart the friend who contravenes the social language of the time. The one who dresses differently, and talks differently, and lives differently from the norm of the neighborhood, the confines of the community. But the Elizabeths who love us take no notice of these differences. Accep-

tance of the differences in the other leaves room for the presence of the person and, as a result, she herself has room to become a new person.

What we accept into our lives in the other changes our own sense of what life is really about. For that reason, acceptance is never merely tolerance, it is vision. It is the new juice of soul that comes from understanding. It is what stretches my own spirit beyond the truisms of yesterday. Acceptance is its own reward.

It is the Elizabeth quality of friendship that separates the friendly from the friends, that makes a chain nothing as meaningless as the unconventional or the unorthodox can break.

Acceptance is the universal currency of real friendship. It allows the other to be the other. It puts no barriers where life should be. It does not warp or shape or wrench a person to be anything other than what they are. It simply opens its arms to hold the weary and opens its heart to hear the broken and opens its mind to see the invisible. Then, in the shelter of acceptance, a person can be free to be even something more. 🌸

Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, is an internationally known author and lecturer, and the executive director of Benetvision: A Resource and Research Center for Contemporary Spirituality in Erie, Pa. Chittister was a featured speaker at the 2008 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering.



Song echoes throughout Scripture. Hannah sings at the birth of her son; Miriam dances at the Red Sea. The rivers clap their hands and the hills sing for joy (Psalm 98). With the angels, we sing “*Gloria in excelsis deo*” to acclaim Jesus’ birth. In the final book of the Bible, Revelation, the sound of the trumpet proclaims Jesus Christ reigning forever and ever.

Mary is one of the most famous singers in the Bible. Her song as it is recorded in Luke’s Gospel has been part of the church’s evening prayer for centuries (see Luke 1:46–55). Like Mary, we bear Jesus through our songs and in our lives. Mary—in her humble yet bold witness to God in Jesus—is a musical mentor.

Musical mentors serve as sounding boards, helping to guide their charges as they search for what makes their hearts sing. Mentors teach, encourage, admonish, and listen. They make themselves available to a searching soul and foster a relationship of trust and care.

by Jennifer Baker-Winn

SINGING WITH MARY



Mentoring relationships flourish among musicians, especially in Lutheran circles. It makes sense for Lutherans to pair music with mentoring, for music has long been integral to Lutheran worship. Martin Luther called music a gift of God and a servant of the gospel. Luther understood that music not only expresses what we believe about God, but can also shape our beliefs. Musicians, congregations, and even music itself mentor us throughout our lives.

Musical Mentoring from Elder to Younger

Do you remember a musician who inspired you? Maybe it was your own mother or father singing to you at home. It could be a school music teacher or a church choir director.

For young people on the path toward careers in music, adult mentors pave the way. This has certainly been true in my own life. Musical mentors formed me in the expected ways: teaching organ lessons, directing choir rehearsals.

s, and modeling fine musicianship and worship leadership. Yet these mentors also had a tremendous impact in less official ways: talking about life on the ride home from choir practice or staying after hours to help with a school project. What I recall most vividly was a mentor's open, caring presence. I recall lessons where I played little music, but learned much about life. In moments such as these, mentors nurtured me as I searched for what young people crave: meaning, acceptance, and guidance.

Community of Musical Mentoring

Individual mentoring relationships are invaluable, but mentoring really thrives in community. An excellent example of a musical mentoring community is Lutheran Summer Music (LSM). This intensive summer program has been mentoring high school musicians since 1981. Held on a Lutheran college campus each year, LSM welcomes more than 150 students from the United States and around the world, all gathered to live, worship, and make music together for four weeks.

Any student who has attended LSM has trouble finding the words to describe the experience. When I was there as a student, I remember being immersed in making music and being surrounded by others who shared my passion. More than that, I discovered other teens who

valued the connection of music to faith. Morning and evening prayer marked our days, and Holy Communion began each week. The Holy Spirit was hard at work, enlivening our playing and praying.

LSM enriches the teens' home congregations as well. Students bring back a heightened love of music, newly honed skills, and an understanding for music's role in worship. Having been mentored, they return to mentor the congregation.

Being Open to the Unexpected

Young people can open our eyes and unstop our ears in unexpected ways. Let's revisit Mary. Mary was a teenager and God entrusted her with a tremendous responsibility. And it was Mary's greeting that caused Elizabeth's infant to leap in her womb. The younger woman had a great effect on her older relative Elizabeth. Still today, the young in our midst can move us in unexpected ways.

I'll never forget Rachel's question. Rachel was a fifth-grader who sang in a church children's choir that I directed. One Tuesday evening as we rehearsed, she raised her hand. "Why are all the stories in the Bible about boys?" she asked. I don't remember my exact answer, I'm sure I said something about the women of the Bible: Mary and Elizabeth, Ruth and Naomi, Leah and yes, her namesake, Rachel. Yet

whatever explanation I offered her, it was probably not enough. My best response would have been to dwell in her question and to find ways to honor both the women of Scripture and the young women in the choir.

We are often surprised by the questions that young people ask us. But these unexpected inquiries point to a way the young can mentor their elders. Young people can open us up to new ways of thinking about the words we sing. When we teach children songs, our faith can be deepened if we only ask them questions like "How did that melody make you feel?" or "How do you understand the word *forgiveness* here in this verse?"

Mentoring in Your Congregation

Churches are musical mentors. Week after week, we gather to sing and play. What do we sing? How do we sing it? We are all mentored through music: budding professional musicians and those who believe that they can't carry a tune.

How can your congregation be a better musical mentor?

Honor gifts. Do you know someone who plays an instrument or could, with some training, be a song leader? Instead of having young people *perform* for us in church, how can their musical gifts serve the whole assembly? A young flute

player could be taught to play a descant on a congregational hymn. A young singer could lead a psalm together with an adult. What's most important is that young people are honored. A negative experience of performing in church can make a young musician reluctant to share talents in the future.

Sing, Sing, Sing! Do you remember singing at home when you were a child, perhaps around the piano? This happens less and less. Music has become something we buy at the mall rather than something we make ourselves. Congregations mentor when they uphold the timeless act of lifting up voices in song.

Sing Together. We do not sing together across the generations much any more. It's easy to assume that young people like one kind of music and older folks like another. Yet people of all ages have varied musical tastes and can learn from each other. I've always been surprised and delighted at how much my younger choir members enjoy rehearsing and singing with other choristers in their 70s and beyond.

Sing New and Old, Near and Far. Did you know that our musical preferences begin to form at age two and that our openness to new sounds declines as we age? When we sing tunes and texts from many eras and

cultures, our ears are opened to fresh ways of hearing God's call.

When I first dreamed of attending Lutheran Summer Music, I thought the fees would make it impossible. To my amazement, my musical mentor informed me that an anonymous donor in my home congregation had offered a full scholarship! This gift was a very bold form of musical mentoring. But whether mentoring takes place in bold leaps or baby steps, your congregation's musical life can have a very positive influence—on the whole congregation, not just the musicians—throughout our lives.

Mysterious Music

Throughout our lives, we are inspired by music. And we have many people to thank for these awesome moments. But sometimes our love of music is a mystery. Often music is our mentor.

Think of a song you learned as a child that you still know by heart. It doesn't matter where you hear it, but when you hear that melody, you are transported to another place. The music itself becomes a mentor that accompanies you along your life's journey.

Every evening, my husband or I sing to my little sons in the rocking chair. For months, I wondered if they were listening. But soon after my older son turned two, he began to sing along. He especially

loves "Dona Nobis Pacem" and "Now Rest Beneath Night's Shad-ow" (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 753 and 568). Since the songs we learn in our earliest years are the ones we will know by heart in our final days, I think carefully about what songs I want to teach my boys. What words and melodies are strong enough to carry us in times of rejoicing or grief or doubt?

Mary's song is a great example of such a worthy song. Christians have been singing "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" for centuries because it expresses the essence of who God is and God's relationship to us: a savior close to a mother's beating heart and worthy of praise, but also a God who turns our expectations upside-down. My prayer is that we are open to how God's call encourages us to sing, to mentor, and to be mentored by others. 🌿

Jennifer Baker-Trinity is a church musician and Associate in Ministry candidate. She and her family live in Winger, Minn.

The 2009 Lutheran Summer Music Academy and Festival will be held June 21-July 19 on the campus of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. To find out more about LSM, visit www.lutheransummermusic.org or call toll free 888-635-6583. To find out more about how congregations can partner with LSM, click on "Congregations join the Young Musicians Partnership" on the Web-site.

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For those whose grandchildren, godchildren, nieces, or nephews aren't Lutheran, consider a subscription to *The Little Christian*. Designed for children age 6 and younger, this magazine features stories, songs, prayers, rituals and activities wrapped up in a colorful and sturdy package in a size just right for little hands. Its 24 pages show children how much God loves them and that Jesus is their savior and friend.

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DVD features Women of the ELCA ministries

"Created in the Image of God: A Community of Women" showcases Women of the ELCA groups across the country living out the mission of our organization and participating in our activities and ministries. Watch the video on Women of the ELCA's Web site at www.womenoftheelca.org.

If you would like a free DVD of Created in the Image of God to help you promote Women of the ELCA in your congregation or synod, call us at 800-638-3522, or e-mail womenoftheelca@elca.org. A discussion guide and poster are included.

New DVD features ELCA Presiding Bishop

ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson is one of 12 "of the world's most influential religious leaders" featured in a new DVD, "In God's Name." Produced by brothers Jules and Gedeon Naudet, the DVD offers insights of the 12 leaders on several issues we face in our post September 11 world, including the rise of terrorism, fanaticism, intolerance, and war.

The program marks the first time that these leaders have appeared in one broadcast. They talk about violence and hatred and reveal their own thoughts about faith, peace, unity, tolerance and hope. Through the eyes of these 12 very different religious figures, the filmmakers discover the common ground among believers around the world.

To view the video or download a free companion study guide, visit www.elca.org/ingodsname.

TURNING HEARTS toward holy home

by Miriam “Mim” Campbell

One summer night several years ago, two little girls were doing their best to prolong bedtime. Linnea, just two, was looking out at the starry sky from her top bunk. Britta, who was in pre-school then, was using her feet to bounce her little sister's mattress from the bottom bunk. Lazy chatter about their day led to an amazing expression of little creeds.

“Mommy, what do you think God looks like?” Linnea asked. I asked back, “What do *you* think God looks like?”

She said, “I think God shines like the stars in the night!” She sat up and stretched her hands out with glee.

What a wonderful image! Although not quite Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:26), it inspired my heart just the same.

Then Britta, my seasoned three-year-old Sunday school student, expressed her opinion. She reached for her latest craft project and announced, “He does not! He's on this piece of paper and you can punch him out and hang him up if you want to. See?”

What a difference one year of life experience can bring. As the mother and teacher of these little theologians, I've devoted my life to discerning the role and responsibility of the congregation and the family in nurturing faith.

That evening became a turning point for me. I thought about my efforts to

juggle all that needed to be done. I was a single parent with four young daughters and a full-time job that called for a good deal of travel. I was barely managing the practical matters—keeping our bodies fed and clothed and in the right places at the right time—much less nurturing my daughters' spirits. But then and there I decided, “Enough is enough.” I had to be more intentional.

GIRLS' ADVENTURE CLUB

My daughters and I reorganized ourselves into an “all for one and one for all” team, the Girls' Adventure Club. We were on a mission to become all that God intended us to be, as individuals and as a family of children of God.

In the months that followed, we scheduled a series of events for work and play, including active kid-friendly workshops on everything from how to settle a disagreement to identifying five steps for washing and drying clothes.

We made signs with step-by-step guides to doing the dishes, cleaning rooms, picking up doggie-doo, and we posted chore charts that listed duties for everyone—including me.

We made spending time together a priority. And we committed ourselves to planning ahead, posting a calendar with all our events and activities, beginning

every week with Sunday worship as a family. And we did our best to stick to the schedule.

Those were the days that instilled an appreciation for shared identity, common purpose, and stability. We made a point of prayer, both on Sundays at church and other days at home. Those times equipped and inspired us to go out into the world with the assurance that we were loved, gifted, and called to be the Girls' Adventure Club!

HEALTHY, HAPPY, HOLY HOME LIFE

Research shows that some 80 percent of teens today see marriage and family life as an important or essential part of their future. If you were to ask them, they probably are not concerned about the skills they will need in order to care for a family or a home. They are focused on the quality of relationships that will be enjoyed there.

The church and home have unique opportunities to equip and empower both girls and boys to be all that God has called them to be. It is our privilege and responsibility to our children to create home lives that foster learning and growing together as a family. These will be the model our children will have when they establish households of their own.

Here are some ways to foster the experience of healthy, happy, holy home life:

- Place a small bowl of water on your kitchen table or counter to remember your baptism with a sign of the cross as you come and go.

Build rituals and traditions that are unique to your family. For example, birthday breakfasts in bed or cookie baking day for the holidays, or the annual summer picnic at a park with s'mores and games.

- Post age-appropriate chore charts and calendars.

- Organize kid-friendly home workshops to teach practical skills and plan schedules.

- Maintain a routine for home life that everyone can depend on, such as Thursday make-your-own pizza night and especially Sunday worship.

- Keep a Bible and devotionals handy so you can look up the Sunday Scripture texts and talk about them together. *The Lutheran Study Bible* would be a good choice. A family copy of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* is nice to have, too, so that you can look up the hymns and prayers. (There's a lot more in the hymnal than just hymns!) You can order both of these from Augsburg Fortress at www.augsburgfortress.com.

Women's groups and congregations can help families grow together. Some ideas:

- Work together with the congregation's children's activities. In the congregation I currently serve, a women's group takes orders for homemade Christmas cookies to be enjoyed at the cookie party that follows our Sunday school Christmas program.

Design a "Prayer Request" bulletin board for everyone to post their joys and concerns and pray for them together.

Provide mentors for new mothers and encourage "church grandmas" to befriend children, especially girls.

Women's groups can "shower" families who have children being baptized or confirmed, presenting them with a new Bible or hymnal.

- Host retreats or other events, such as a service project or special meal, for mothers and daughters to nurture their identities as women of faith and discover their gifts and interests. The summer Bible study in the June and July/August issues of *Lutheran Woman Today* would be an ideal program for mothers and daughters (and grandmothers) to experience together. See page 26 in this issue.

The key to teaching children about family and home life is to model a commitment to it yourself. Graciously welcome and engage children in the tasks and privileges of being a part of the family and creating a healthy, happy, holy home. It will take patience and dedication, but your efforts will leave a lasting legacy. 🌸

Miriam (Mim) Campbell is director of faith formation for children and family at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minn. She served for 10 years as ELCA associate director for children and family. She is daily challenged and inspired by four daughters, who are creating their own versions of home.

There's a little bit of Katie in all of us.

Katharina von Bora Luther was a practical and bold woman of faith. She was also the dedicated partner of her husband, Martin. The example she set as a wife and mother, farmer, entrepreneur, leader, and caregiver continues to inspire us today.

Through Katie's Fund, Women of the ELCA honors her life by developing leaders, bridging cultures, and nurturing faith.



Katharina von Bora Luther

Won't you help continue Katie's legacy? Support Katie's Fund!



Use the envelope in this
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RACE NOTES

Honoring a Bold Woman

Linda Post Bushkofsky



Katharina von Bora

Luther was a practical and bold woman of faith. She set an example as wife, mother, entrepreneur, and farmer that continues to inspire us today.

Katie, as we fondly call her, was born on January 29, 1499. When she was six, her mother died, and Katie's father sent her to a convent to be cared for by the nuns. Later Katie moved to a Cistercian convent in Nimbschen, where she took her vows as a nun in 1515. Life in the convent provided Katie with a rare opportunity for most girls and women in that day: an education.

Because of that, she learned of Martin Luther and his Reformation ideas. On Holy Saturday in 1523, after the Easter Vigil, Katie and 11 other nuns who respected Luther's teachings secretly left the cloister, an offense that was punishable by death. The 12 traveled to Wittenberg where Luther assisted the women in establishing new lives.

Katie was the last to settle into a new life, but that she did on June 13, 1525, when she and Luther married. Theirs was a public and controversial marriage. Katie and Martin were given a former monastery in Wittenberg as a wedding gift, and soon Katie was managing the household. She bred cattle. She ran a brewery. She took in boarders. She grew food for her family (in time she had six children). She often participated in Luther's table talks where she used the Latin she had learned in the convent.

Katie died on December 20, 1552, six years after Martin.

Women of the ELCA honors Katie Luther's bold life by developing leaders, bridging cultures, and nurturing faith, and also with Katie's Fund. The fund began as an endowment in 1997 from gifts given in thanks for the first 10 years of Women of the ELCA ministries.

In its first decade, Katie's Fund received more than 3,200 gifts from more than 1,375 donors. Contributions to the fund have come in all sizes, from \$1 to more than \$3,000.

Support for Katie's Fund is widespread. Nine SWOs have contributed more than \$4,000 each to Katie's Fund: Lower Susquehanna, Nebraska, New England, Northeastern Iowa, Northern Illinois, Rocky Mountain, Southeastern, Southeastern Minnesota, Southwestern Minnesota. The Nebraska Synodical Women's Organization (SWO) has made the largest number of gifts, more than 77.

To date, interest earned by the fund has provided leadership opportunities for young women at Triennial Gatherings and global networking on behalf of the organization. It has also supported our participation in ELCA's national Youth Gatherings.

You have two options for giving to Katie's Fund. You can give to the annual portion of the fund for current needs or to the endowment, which uses the interest earned by your gift in perpetuity. Won't you help continue Katie's legacy by supporting this important fund? 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.

For more information or for assistance including Katie's Fund in your estate plan, please contact: Linda Post Bushkofsky, 800-638-3522, ext. 2740, linda.bushkofsky@elca.org.

Seal the envelope in this issue to send check to support Katie's Fund.



AMEN!

Trust the Calling

by Catherine Malotky

The faces on the sign

are so young. They look straight at me as I pass, a trick of photography and marketing. So fresh. Just barely adults. I think of my daughters, my nephews and nieces, just beginning to make their way.

We want them to do well, God. My siblings and their dear loves, my love and I, we all want them to do well, to love life, and to be blessed.

These young ones are spectacular human beings, each unique and beloved, each with gifts to share and the capacity to make our world a better place. And there are so many like them. I see them in church, at the grocery store, in the school play, trudging across campus, riding the bus downtown to work for the first time. They come home bright-eyed from a first date, or victorious after a good game, or challenged by a hard assignment.

And they will, as we once did, head out into the world. And they will, as we do, learn lessons about how life really is—lessons that both damage and develop them into the people they are becoming. God, how will you be in their lives? How will you call them to further your mission in the world? What will you ask of them?

Mary was young like this, not yet tested. I suspect her mother was not happy when her daughter reported the angel's message.

The path you called Mary to was rife with threat and challenge. She could have been ruined before her life really began. Some, I'm sure, pity her for hav-

ing to bury a crucified son. In life, his constant turmoil with religious leaders was not an easy path for him, or for her, his mother.

To this, you called her when she was so very young. What do you have in mind for the young men and women we love, God? And what do you have in mind for us, who must let them go off into their lives? Will we have the strength of spirit to hear your voice and encourage them in spite of our own losses? We can so easily default to protection mode, to circle the wagons and keep them safe from the damage we incurred at their age.

But God, you call them to service. They cannot fulfill their calling in the world if we have built a fortress around them. How do we foster space for these precious ones, space and quiet enough for your voice to get through?

How do we see the world through the eyes of the young, the future we might not see with our own? How do we mirror back the gifts we see and support their becoming? Can we bear our own mortality enough to celebrate the change and innovation they will bring? Can we trust them to tend and grow our legacy? Can we trust you, God?

Make us wise, God. And a little hip too. Open us to the mystery of your calling in all of us, and teach us to trust. In Jesus' name. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



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*created in the image of God,
called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and
empowered by the Holy Spirit,*

We commit ourselves to
*grow in faith,
affirm our gifts,
support one another in our callings,
engage in ministry and action, and
promote healing and wholeness
in the church, the society,
and the world.*

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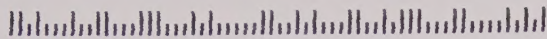
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